

Through Friendship Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival Blooms  
By Amy Blades Steward

When clarinetist J. Lawrie Bloom and cellist Marcy Rosen met at a music festival in Pennsylvania in 1972, neither dreamed they would later collaborate for 26 years as artistic co-directors of one of the nation's most prestigious chamber music festivals – Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival, held in June each year on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

J. Lawrie Bloom helped found the Festival in 1986 with his father, Ralph, who had retired to St. Michaels, MD from Princeton, NJ. Bloom, who had just begun his career as a clarinetist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, recalls, "My father and I explored the idea with several residents in St. Michaels, who had an appreciation for chamber music. After determining that there was significant interest here, I contacted my friend Marcy Rosen, who was a founding member of the Mendelssohn String Quartet, and invited a few musicians from the quartet to come play with me. That first year, we did one public concert and one private concert, to fundraise for the next year's event." He adds, "My initial interest in establishing this Festival was to find a way to visit my parents in this lovely location and get to perform as well."

It was during the first year of the Festival, that Bloom realized he needed help to put on the Festival the following year and he invited Rosen to be his artistic co-director. Rosen, who made her concerto debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the age of eighteen, has since appeared with such noted orchestras as the Dallas Symphony, the Phoenix Symphony, and the Tokyo Symphony. The two musicians have remained the Festival's artistic co-directors ever since. Rosen comments, "As artistic co-directors, Lawrie and I have a very compatible relationship with similar taste and standards in the musicians with whom we like to play. We also bring different ideas to the repertoire to keep things fresh."

Over the years, the Festival grew from a week-long event to two full weeks of concerts. Bloom remembers the two rules he and Rosen established early on for inviting musicians to attend. He quips, “First and foremost, they had to be excellent musicians. Secondly, they had to want to spend an entire week together playing music and socializing – we all had to be able to get along.”

According to Bloom, chamber musicians play best for people for whom they care and the Festival offers just the right atmosphere. During the two- week Festival, musicians spend a lot of time rehearsing and playing together, as well as socializing with their audiences and hosts, developing very personal and long lasting relationships. He states, “Chamber music is a very intimate art form and that carries over to the audience as well. We have gotten to know members of our audiences over the years as many return each year. This is what makes Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival such a unique venue and different from other festivals around the country.”

According to Rosen, “We have also made our Festival a destination – where people can come to enjoy the beautiful location and the amenities of the Eastern Shore, but also to hear world class concerts – the best you will hear anywhere.”

When asked how the Festival continues to draw such high caliber musicians year after year, both directors reply that Festival creates a venue where musicians enjoy making music together. In addition, the 20-plus musicians have bonded with the Eastern Shore families who host them each year, enriching their Festival experiences. Many host families have become close friends with the artists, keeping in touch with them throughout the year and attending their concerts in other venues.

In addition to their roles as artistic co-directors, Both Rosen and Bloom have supported the efforts of Chesapeake Chamber Music to develop its outreach effort to school-aged children in the region. Bloom initiated the idea early on with the Festival's Youth Concert. The Chesapeake Chamber Music organization has presented concerts for the children of Talbot County schools for 25 years, and in the 2006-2007 school year, the Chesapeake Chamber Music's YouthReach Program began to provide elementary school children in Talbot County with a beginning string music experience called First Strings. In the 2008-2009 school year, the program was expanded to Dorchester County, and via a new Presto! Program, extended further to children wanting to go beyond "First Strings." Today, over 600 elementary school children now participate in these programs.

Bloom has also reached out to students in the Chicago Public Schools and is now involved in a new ensemble called Civitas, which involves members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Among their activities, they will be playing for children in area cancer hospitals. Bloom, a 10-year cancer survivor himself, credits music as being a healing art form. Rosen routinely reaches out to students, as well, by doing master classes in the schools in communities where she performs, helping to influence children's overall exposure to music. Bloom comments, "All of us who make music were exposed to music early on. We believe that every child should have the opportunity to hear music. It is an incredible language that is universal to all people."

Although they both lead the lives of busy musicians, Bloom and Rosen, still enjoy their annual collaboration at the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival and the chance to renew friendships with the fellow musicians, patrons, and hosts who have made the Festival so successful over the years. Bloom is celebrating his 31st season as clarinet and bass clarinet with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and continues to teach at the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern

University's School of Music and to perform with several chamber groups in Chicago. He is working with the RICO reed company to develop a new bass clarinet reed, and is consulting with the Buffet Crampon instrument company to help develop a new bass clarinet. He lives in Chicago, IL, with his wife Nan, a costume designer, who Rosen introduced him to years ago. He and his wife have two children.

Rosen has performed in recital and with orchestras throughout Canada, England, France, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, and all fifty of the United States. In recital, she has appeared in New York at such acclaimed venues as Carnegie Hall, the 92nd Street "Y" and Merkin Concert Hall; in Washington D.C. at the Kennedy Center, Dumbarton Oaks, the Phillips Collection and the Corcoran Gallery, where she for many years she hosted a series entitled "Marcy Rosen and Friends." Rosen is currently Professor of Cello at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College and on the faculty at the Mannes College of Music in New York City. She lives in Englewood, NJ.

For further information about the 2011 Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival, visit [www.ChesapeakeChamberMusic.org](http://www.ChesapeakeChamberMusic.org) or call 410 819-0380.

**CUTLINE: Pictured are clarinetist J. Lawrie Bloom and cellist Marcy Rosen, artistic co-directors of the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival, to be held June 5 through June 19, 2011 at locations throughout the Mid Shore.**



**Bloom**



**Rosen**